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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Society for Protection of Street & Working Children, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[7 February 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.



Structural Violence against Children or Child Abuse

Child abuse has been around for a long time in all human societies, in various forms, unfortunately, it has continued and even increased for various reasons.

Despite appearing in various forms, all types of child abuse including physical, psychological, emotional abuse, neglect and inattention to children and their needs, have one common feature, they all seriously harm children because the physical and mental health are deeply interconnected and both as an integrated whole, affect the life and personality of a child.

Therefore, any kind of harm - such as child labor - which is inflicted on the child's body, affects her/his psyche, and any kind of harm to the child's psyche affects her/ his physical health.

In recent decades, structural or social harms have been added to the existing forms of child abuse, and inflict serious harms to children.

It should be noted that structural child abuse is not inflicted on the body and mind of a children by an individual or group, but are the result of mal functioning of societies and their socio-economic structures.

Factors that cause structural child abuse include war, poverty, social gaps, forced migration, discrimination in all forms, injustice and inequality, and so on.

These factors cause children more harm and deprive them of their basic rights such as education, health, peace, play, happiness and living in a family, the enjoyment of which is the vital need of their age. The harm deprives them of enjoying decent lives and protection of their basic human rights.

Forced migration, due to unhealthy socio-economic conditions or war, is another type of structural violence, especially when children are forced to unaccompanied illegal migration which confronts them with severe physical and psychological harms and abuse.

Recently, UNICEF posted a picture of a large number of backpacks belonging to children who got drowned and lost their lives in the depths of water, while migrating illegally, and after a while, their backpacks were found ashore. It was a really painful and horrible scene.

Regional wars are another example of structural violence in which many children have either lost their lives or are facing a variety of serious problems such as hunger, malnutrition, limitation of access to safe drinking water, deprivation of education and losing peace of mind. The figures that show the number of children killed in regional armed conflicts in recent years, prove the negative effects of this form of structural violence perpetrated by governments on children.

Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic also increased the severity of child abuses by deteriorating the economic and social conditions of countries facing them with problems such as poverty, unrest, despair, and so on.

We all know that children are the most valuable human assets of any society and have an effective role to play in building the future of any country, but the role can be played properly in adulthood, if they have had a decent life as a child and enjoy their basic rights to education, health and family, experiencing happiness and hope, otherwise, not only they will not be able to play a constructive role, but also they may create problems in their communities.

To prevent and reduce these forms of violence, all countries should take steps to reform their socio-economic structures. At the international level, States need to help developing countries reduce their problems, with proper planning. In addition, regional tensions and conflicts among countries and should be prevented.

One of the important factors in reducing social child abuse is prevention.

Prevention means taking action before a problem occurs and continue to fix or reduce it.

Recently, the United Nations has introduced "creative prevention", which is translated to accountability and responsibility of governments to prevent social harms, including structural child abuse.

Since social violence is caused by the socio-economic situation of societies, it is obvious that the political will of governments has a fundamental and effective role in reducing it.

But in this regard, grass-root participation and coordination with governments, especially in the current Covid crisis, not only plays an important role in preventing and reducing social violence, but also can address other challenges of societies.

Therefore, to prevent and reduce structural child abuse, like other social harms, it is necessary to pay attention to the two basic principles, namely, "responsibility of governments" and "grass-root participation".
